

February 2012 Book Reviews

The Bear Who Shared

By Catherine Rayner

This is a sweet, easy book about a wise, kind bear who shared his fruit with two little guys who were determined to get it for themselves. The illustrations are so fun and kids will identify with the characters in the classic "to share or not to share" dilemma. Recommended for preschool and Kindergarteners, this would be a good addition to any collection.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

My Cold Went on Vacation

By Molly Rausch and Nora Krug

This is the creative story of a child's cold that "goes on vacation" around the world affecting families, animals and people in different countries and oceans. The map in the back shows the cold's path so this is a cute little geography book. The illustrations are cute and colorful. Any child would get a kick out of this book and it could be a part of any collection. Not a classic but funny.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Paula Bunyan

By Phillis Root

This is the story of Paul Bunyan's sister in true tall tale form. We have all kinds of adventures from singing that smashes glass to taming a bear for a footwarmer and training wolves to sing three part harmony, and the climax luring chicken-size mosquitoes (maybe not so much a tall tale) to chase off lumberjacks. This is a fun book with good illustrations that any elementary age child would enjoy. This is a good addition to any collection.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Looking for the Easy Life

By Walter Dean Myers

This is the story of a troop of monkeys who think they'll buck tradition and try to find a life with no work. After several life threatening escapades, they land their easy life only to realize that it's boring and they like to work for themselves and what they need. It's a cute book with cute illustrations, characters and dialects and a good message for kids. Work is a good thing with the right attitude. This is a great book for any age... college students may find this helpful and this could be a good part of any collection.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Road Work Ahead

By Anastasia Suen

This is a colorful, fun book about a boy who's on a road trip to Grandma's and all the great machines he sees working along the way. It's a great book for kiddos who love big machines. The illustrations are colorful; the text is easy. Most preschool and early elementary boys would make this a popular pick in any library they visit.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Pearl and Wagner Four Eyes

By Kate McMullen

This is an early chapter book all about how the school nurse comes in for eye checks, and much to Wagner's dismay she sends him to the eye doctor. He's not thrilled about his glasses, especially when he's teased about being four eyes. But his loyal friends make it all better with their empathy and humor. This is a good book for elementary early readers to read themselves but the lessons about how friends can show compassion and turn bad situations around is a good one for any age. This is part of a series of Pearl and Wagner books that are all full of fun illustrations, easy text, good stories and some fun along the way. This book is recommended for any library.

Heather Reid, home school parent, Omaha, NE

Vulture's Wake

By Kirsty Murray

In Australia, bird flu wiped out all the females a long time ago or so Callum thought. But then he is kidnapped by Outstationers and saved by Bo, a female. They set off across a huge continent to find his two fathers where he hopes they'll be safe and Bo can be part of the family. But when they arrive at Vulture's Gate, survival will be paramount for them and he'll find one father has died and the other completely changed. This book was dark, brutal, futuristic and nothing about it was fun to read. The Accelerated Reader level is 5.1. Although much was innuendo, there were references about the few young (from toddler to pre teen age) surviving girls becoming "ripe" – getting their periods; being "nice" to old men that might eventually make them their wives; and the brutality of these men surviving in this apocalyptic city. And this was all regarding 11-12 year-old characters (I think). I found nothing of this book worthy for middle school students to read and did not check again on the ages of the characters. I would not recommend it. There seems to be a glut of books about dystopian societies and this one does not measure up to the good ones.

Deb Daehnke

Garmann's Street

By Stian Hole

Garman is a sweet little boy who is bullied by a boy named Roy. Roy makes Garman drop a match into a man's overgrown yard. After the fire is put out Garman strikes up a friendship with the man whose yard he accidentally set on fire. For grades 4th and 5th. The illustrations of this book are very intriguing. Real pictures mix with drawings to bring this book to life. Some of the pictures are almost scary they are so real. The message in this book is kind of deep for young readers. This book would make a good read-a-loud book so an adult could visit with students about some of the topics. Overall, this book was very well-done.

Lara Morrow

Teacher's Pet

By Laurie Halse Anderson

Twelve-year-old Maggie will be a seventh grader starting middle school and she is not excited about it at all. She doesn't feel she's smart enough, fears the extra homework, and is not really prepared to work hard to succeed. She and her friends work at her Grandmother's Vet Clinic and when Mr. Carlson, the new teacher starts, they realize he is blind and has a guide dog. They volunteer to help him take care of his small animals in the classroom that he affectionately calls Carlson's Critters. Maggie learns a little about herself while helping Mr. Carlson learn to use his guide dog more efficiently; and they help each other realize that neither one of them can give up. This book is one of the Vet Volunteers series. Very enjoyable to read and had much to share about working in a vet clinic and how guide dogs are trained to help their owners. It is written in a way that should really interest middle school students. I would recommend it. Although the character Maggie is going to be a seventh grader in the book, I think younger children will find it more appealing. I think seventh graders might find it a little babyish for them.

Deb Daehnke

Reading to Peanut

By Leda Schubert

Lucy begins to read by printing sings and affixing them to the corresponding item. As the book progresses she gets better and better at reading. This book has interesting illustrations to support the story line. The book would be best for young children in the public school setting. I recommend the purchase of this book.

Sharon Kinnan

Merry Christmas, Splat

By Rob Scotton

Splat the cat is so worried that he hasn't been good enough for Santa that he begins doing all kinds of things to help. (Some are not so helpful.) He waits all night for Santa but "knows" he didn't come. The illustrations are well-done. Young children, especially, would identify with the story line. It would be good for public or school libraries. I would definitely recommend this book.

Sharon Kinnan

Skate Fate

By Juan Felipe Herrera

I tried to read this but no matter how many times I picked it up, I could not force myself to read past the first couple of pages of poems. It seemed to ramble and is not what I would call good poetry. There has to be a better way to introduce young adults to verse.

Diane Limoges

The Brilliant Fall of Gianna Z

By Kate Messner

Gianna has a big leaf project due for Science. In the midst of working on the project the family deals with her grandmother's possible alzheimers and the loss of her friend's grandmother. Gianna is to run in a track event, but must pass Science class. The story line is intertwined and very interesting throughout the book. It would be good for middle elementary through High School. It would work for both a school library and public library. I recommend this book.

Sharon Kinnan

Layla, Queen of Hearts

By Glenda Millard

Layla needs a senior citizen to attend a special event at her school. She tries to invite several people, but to no avail. In a long shot she invites a forgetful neighborhood woman, who agrees to go! The story starts out slow, but gets better midway through the book. This would be suitable for middle to upper grades in a school or public library setting. I would not choose this book for a purchase.

Sharon Kinnan

The Village that Vanished

By Ann Grifalconi

The village of Yao has always been safe from slavers, but they keep getting closer. To avoid being caught they move their village deep in the forest, destroy all signs of their old village and leave one grandmother behind, who says it's too far and she can't travel that far. The villagers pray for protection and safety, the slavers come, they find the grandmother. She tells them she is a soothsayer and she knows how to use magic potions. They don't believe her and they begin to search and search, but they do not find anyone. The chief becomes angry, but they leave and never come back. The village of Yao was saved. This book is recommended for grades 2nd- 5th.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

The Adventures of Granny Clearwater and Little Critter

By Kimberly Willis Holt

A western story filled with fluff and hokum, will keep your kids smiling from cover to cover. This family does some unbelievable feats starting with Granny and Little Critter being thrown out of the covered wagon on the way west. Granny and Little Critter are left behind and spend most of the book attempting to reunite with the rest of the family. This book contains cute and colorful pictures. This book is recommended for grades K – 3rd.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

Tenth Avenue Cowboy

By Linda Oatman High

Ben and his family were ranchers from out west. In 1910 his family decides to ditch ranching and move to Hell's Kitchen in New York City so that they can get better paying jobs. Ben loves horses and dreams of being a cowboy, not being marooned in a city with mean boys and even meaner girls. He hates the smells of the city and just wants to go back to wide open spaces. One day he hears about the Tenth Ave. Cowboys whose job was to ride before the train and warn people that it was coming. One cowboy tells Ben about Pebble yard on Tenth Ave. and 30th St. where the cowboys wait for the train whistles to signal an oncoming train. Ben is invited to visit the horses with him. Ben goes every day because he loves horses so much. One day he is allowed to ride with the Tenth Ave Cowboys and it is magical. This book is recommended for grades 1st – 4th.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public Schools

Leo the Snow Leopard

By Craig, Juliana, and Isabella Hatkoff

Snow Leopards live in the wild with their mothers for two years so they can learn how to be a leopard. When Leo was seven weeks old something happened to his mother and a kindly Pakistani goat herd did what he could to help Leo. He took him home and fed him keeping him safe, till he got too big. Many organizations and two countries were involved in keeping Leo safe, and teaching him how to be a snow leopard. Snow leopards are an endangered species and it is crucial to keep each one of them alive. Right now he is being housed in the Bronx Zoo until Pakistan has a place that he can go to continue his life. This book is nonfiction and recommended for grades 2nd-7th.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

A Whole Nother Story

By Dr. Cuthbert Soup

Along with his wife, Mr. Cheese has invented a time machine that is almost ready to try. When his wife mysteriously dies, the Cheese Man and his three children, along with their dog, find themselves always on the move. International spies and even the government want to get their hand on the machine. After drinking a mixer of pills that Mr. Cheese was going to flush down the toilet, Pinky the dog has become clairvoyant and is always able to warn the family when danger is near. On the latest move the children find themselves making friends that they don't want to leave. Can this finally be the place they can call home? For grades 4th through 6th. There is a lot of bouncing around with so many different people to keep track of and no real rhyme or reason to their purpose. In the end it finally all sort of comes together. Mostly though, this is truly "A Whole NOTHING Story".

The Tree

By Karen Gray Ruelle

This book comes with historical notes and a time line of what was going on in New York City near where this 250 year old tree grew. I would classify this book genre as historical fiction. Unfortunately today the tree is dying if not gone. Starting 1686 – just swampy land existed, in the 1700's the park area had put up a tavern for travelers. In about 1756 the tree began to grow. 1794 marked a yellow fever outbreak and a cemetery was erected to bury the immigrants, paupers and those who couldn't be buried in a regular cemetery. During the War of 1812 it became a practice ground for military maneuvers. A Refuge House was built nearby in 1825 housing juvenile delinquents, orphans and children of parents who were jailed or in asylums. In 1839 it burned. It became Madison Square Park with pigs, and later a baseball diamond was installed. The park continued, with a hotel being built close by that became the headquarters of the Republican Party. Famous people lived near there, Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill's mother, and novelists Henry James and Herman Melville. Civil War camps were established near the park, then a train station. The arm of the Statue of Liberty was displayed where people could tour it. What a wonderful place, what a great tree! This book is recommended for grades 3rd-7th.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

The Buffalo are Back

By Jean Craighead George

Many, many years ago when the United States was very young, the buffalo lived in harmony with the Native Americans, and the tall grasses. The ecosystem was strong and each of them played an important part in supporting our land. First white men killed off the buffalo and then plowed off the tall grass. When there was nothing left to eat the Native Americans disappeared. The depression and dust storms came and it looked bad. President Teddy Roosevelt sent conservationists out to look for buffalo. They weren't sure they would find any, but there were going to try. One person found a few. They made the area they were living in a preserve. Others found tall grass on school grounds, and in cemeteries, places that hadn't been plowed. 30,000 acres were set aside for wild grass. Now there are a lot of buffalo and several kinds of grass are thriving. Americans today learned their lesson and know they need to take care of the land if they want the land to take care of them. This is a great book and should be in every library! This book is recommended for grades K – 5th.

Carol Tramp, Wynot Public School

Black Angels

By Linda Beatrice Brown

The Civil War battles cause three young people to be caught without an adult. Daylily has seen her mama killed; a negro boy, Luke, was escaping from the plantation when it is burned. The two meet a younger white child who has lived his entire life as a child of privilege. The book follows these youngsters as they learn to depend on and trust each other as they try to stay alive and move North during the war. This book would be great in any type of library and is recommended for grades 4th-12th. This was a great book to help the reader realize how important race was during the Civil War. The story told the difficulties of the war. Staying alive was a problem, but learning to accept people for who they are was more important than station in life. The experiences in life caused their attitudes to be forever changed in their adult lives.

Kathy Muller

Splish, Splash, Splat

By Rob Scotton

Splat is a cat who loves Candy Fish and does not like the idea that tough cat, Spike, is coming over to play. He will have to hide his candy fish and his toys or fearless Spike will take or break what Splat has. When both cats have to go swimming at cat school, Splat soon learns that Spike is not always fearless. This book would be great for any kind of library and is recommended for students Preschool-1st grade. The illustrations are very colorful and would be appealing to the reader. This would be an excellent book to use to help kids realize that everyone has some fears.

Kathy Muller

The English Roses: Ready, Set, Vote!

By Madonna

Nicole sees a lot of problems around school and decides to run for class president. Grace, who lives for football (or soccer as it is called in the U.S.) has sprained her ankle and is unable to practice for two weeks, decides to be Nicole's campaign manager. Now Grace has gotten carried away and is running the campaign as if it's one of her football games and she is determined that Nicole should win no matter what. Now it is up to Nicole and the rest of the English Roses to take control before Grace can get more carried away. There is a lot of rambling before you get to the actual story line. Once the plot of the story takes hold it is a fun story with a lesson as well. This book is recommended for grades 4th and up.

Diane Limoges

Breakaway

By Andrea Montalbano

Seventh-grader Lily, or LJ as she is called, is the team captain of her soccer team. Sometimes she feels like she was born kicking a ball. LJ's problem is her temper both on and off the field. Now not only has she been suspended for not following the directions of her coach, and ball hogging, but her temper has gotten the best of her. Now she is spending her two weeks suspension washing dishes in her father's restaurant. To add insult to injury her best friend has been named to the State Select Team that LJ was sure she would get. Having to sit next to her coach while her teammates are struggling on the field, LJ learns the true meaning of teamwork and sportsmanship. This book is recommended for grades 4th – 8th. Here is a fun story that also teaches about teamwork and true sportsmanship.

Diane Limoges

Tangled

By Carolyn Mackler

Skye's mom has offered Jena and her mom a trip to the Caribbean with her and Skye. Jena's mom jumps at the chance. Now Skye and Jena are forced to room together but they go different ways as much as possible. When Dakota's on-again, off-again girlfriend is killed in a car accident his mom decides to take him and his brother Owen to the Caribbean to give Dakota a chance to heal. Dakota is a jock and Owen is a computer geek. The two of them also go their separate ways. Here are four very different teenagers whose paths cross in some way or another during their short vacation tangling their lives together in strange and unusual ways. Reading level 8th grade and up. Though the book has a slow beginning, once it starts to flow there is a good story line that most teenagers will be able to relate to in some way.

Diane Limoges

Foxy and Egg

By Alex Smith

Egg shows up at Foxy's house one cold, snowy day. Foxy invites Egg in to be polite, then she forms an evil plan to eat Egg. However, Egg has a plan of his own. During the night he hatches into a horrible creature. This book is recommended for grades K-2nd and is great for all kinds of libraries. This was a cute story. Students will love the way the plot changes and that in the end Egg gets the best of Foxy.

Lara Morrow

Won Ton

By Lee Wardlaw

Won Ton is a cat in an animal shelter. This story tells about her journey from the shelter to a new home. Each event of her day is written like a Haiku poem. This book is recommended for grades 2nd – 3rd. Written in Haiku this book gives an interesting twist on an animal's journey to a better life. I loved the part in the book where the cat is riding in the car. She meows 'let me out, let me out' over and over again. So true with cats in the car!

Lara Morrow

A Pet for Petunia

By Paul Schmid

A cute whimsical story of a little girl named, ironically, Petunia who wants nothing more in this world than to have a pet skunk. She is told no, but nothing deters her until she has an encounter with a real skunk. This was a real cute, "stinky" book! I recommend this book for every library and for Primary Grades. The watercolor art is fantastic and interesting to look at. Loved the story and shared it with Primary Classes. They laughed all the way through it!

Kristy Wittler

Hey, Rabbit

By Sergio Ruzzier

Rabbit has a magical suitcase. If you ask, the suitcase will grant you a wish. The dog gets a bone birthday cake, the toucan gets a rainforest, and the mouse gets cheese. What does Rabbit want? He wants all of his friends. This book is recommended for grades 4th – 6th, and good for any library. I think there are too many good stories with great illustrations – you don't want this mediocre one! This is a picture book – you can find details in the drawings- colorful. Not a great book, OK illustrations.

Lenell Quinn

The English Roses: American Dreams

By Madonna

The English Roses are two friends who live in England. They have diverse ethnic and socio-economic conditions. In this installment, Binah travels to America to stay with Grace Harrison's family. In this way English children can learn about life in the Southern U.S. This book is recommended for grades 3rd-5th. Good for any library. Illustrations are small but cute, faces fit personality of the girls. Young girls would enjoy the close friendship of these two girls, the clothes, the communication, the secrets. This book is good for children about to take a long vacation-being homesick can be overcome.

Lenell Quinn

Ratfink

Marcia Thornton Jones

Logan has a problem. He is forever telling stories, better known as LIES, to cover up the mistakes he makes daily! His problems are compounded by a "live-in" Grandpa who has Alzheimer's and a girl named Emily who has made it her #1 priority to make Logan's life a nightmare. Recommended for 4th through 6th grades and would be great for both public and school libraries. This is a real life drama. The world is seen through Logan's eyes and he comes to understand how others feel. I think this book would be terrific in the classroom where students could discuss family illness, complex relationships with friends, and what it feels like to be the new kid at school.

LeNell Quinn, Winside Public School

Karma

By Cathy Ostlere

Fifteen-year-old Maya has lost her mom. Now she and her dad take her mom's ashes to their resting place, traveling from Canada to India. When they get to India they find the country in unrest. When Maya finds herself separated from her father she finds herself depending on Sandeep, a boy she hardly knows, to help keep her safe. This book is for grades 9th and up. This is a story of coming of age as well as struggling with not only two very different religions but the two different cultures of her parents. This book shows promise but falls flat. How the book was ever published is beyond this reader's comprehension. The young adult who struggles to read will get nothing out of this book, while the avid will want something with more substance. Don't waste your time on this book.

Diane Limoges

The Greatest Snowman in the World

By Peter Hansen

Charles, an energetic chinchilla, has a plan one snowy morning to create a snowman with his pals. This book is recommended for Preschool and Kindergarten grades. This book is great for both public and school libraries. The author/illustrator keeps the readers interested by drawing from different angles in the book. He also moves the text around to keep the reader on his/her toes. This story was a different take on a snowy story. This would be an excellent book to teach students what a chinchilla is.

Lara Morrow